Appendix II: "It's our grief": Faulkner's Treatment of African-American Narrative Spaces in *Go Down, Moses*[1]

The climax of *Go Down, Moses*' closing, titular section fascinates me because it makes explicit something that occurs more subtly several times throughout the novel. In that scene, Gavin Stevens, a white Jefferson lawyer, attends a wake for Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, a Black man who is the grandson of Mollie and Lucas Beauchamp. Stevens goes there to the wake out of respect for Mollie and the Worshams, whom he has known all his life. Stevens had paid for the younger Beauchamp's body to be brought to Jefferson (Beauchamp had been executed in an Illinois prison) and also paid for most of the funeral expenses. When he arrives at the wake, though, he almost immediately feels extremely uncomfortable as he listens to the mourners' call-and-response, comparing Roth Edmonds to Pharaoh and the dead Samuel to Benjamin[2], and rapidly leaves: "*Soon I will be outside*, he thought. *Then there will be air, space, breath*" (362[3]). Miss Worsham follows him out, and they have the following exchange:

> "I'm sorry," Stevens said. I ask you to forgive me. I should have known. I shouldn't have come."
>
> "It's all right," Miss Worsham said. "It's our grief." (363)

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[1] This has its beginnings in my blog post "'I was listening to myself': African-American Space and the Forcing of Faulkner's Narrative Hand," from *Domestic Issue* (19 June 2019, johnbuaas.com/2019/06/19/i-was-listening-to-myself-african-american-space-and-the-forcing-of-faulkners-narrative-hand-in-go-down-moses/. Accessed 14 Mar. 2020.)

[2] See Genesis 42-45. Benjamin is the brother of Joseph (who had been sold into captivity by his other brothers and had since become second only to Pharaoh in power in Egypt), and whom Joseph orders to come as proof of his brothers' and father's sincerity that they are not spies.

[3] Italics are the author's. Except where indicated, all quoted passages are from the edition of *Go Down, Moses* published by Vintage in 1991.

At the risk of belaboring the obvious here, it is not that the room is physically too small to accommodate Stevens. Rather, he belatedly recognizes that he does not belong in that room, that, indeed, there is no space of any sort for him ("[Outside] *there will be air, space, breath*."); that which Miss Worsham describes as "our grief" does not seem to allow him room.

While the narrative arc of that story hinges on Stevens' encounter in the Worshams' sitting room, several other encounters, some more subtle and some just as explicit, occur between white men (and/or the narrator) and Black spaces throughout *Go Down, Moses*, some of which I discuss in Chapter Two of this project. Most of those other moments, though, function more as providing a kind of texture to these narratives than as moments that are central to them. I do not by any means intend to trivialize their presence in the novel, however. On the contrary, they serve as signs of both the indirect consequences of Faulkner's authorial choices as he worked to link stand-alone stories into a more-unified narrative he considered a novel, and of his growing sensitivity toward, and awareness of, Black spaces.[4] That awareness chiefly consists of his recognition that whiteness (not just his white characters, but himself as well) renders those spaces as to some extent inaccessible. ("It's our grief.")[5] In his book *Heart in Conflict: Faulkner's Struggles with Vocation*, Michael Grimwood

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[4] This last surely was informed by the death of the Faulkner family maid, Caroline Barr, and his complicated dealings with her family as he insisted on holding a funeral for her at Rowan Oak and buying a headstone for her grave, all while Faulkner was working on *Go Down, Moses*. See_____ for a description of those events. Readers knowing of Gavin Stevens in "Go Down, Moses" and Faulkner's behavior regarding Barr's death can be forgiven if they see Stevens' actions as Faulkner's implicit acknowledgment that he should not have behaved as he had in his dealings with Barr's family.

[5] It seems fitting that Miss Worsham is delineating a Black wake here as a space belonging to Black people. Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke UP, 2016) explores "wake" in all that word's meanings (wakes for the dead (at which the sitters remain awake), Black people's collective experience of slavery and its aftermath as evoked by the wake of a ship); in doing so, she argues "that rather than seeking a resolution to blackness's ongoing and irresolvable abjection, one might approach black being in the wake as a form of *consciousness*" (14, author's italics). It is, in other words, an atemporal rather than linear space.

To adequately and justly explore the connections between Sharpe's thesis and Faulkner's text lies outside the scope of this appendix, but for me they do add resonance and depth to, in particular, those comments of Minrose Gwin's that I am working with here. I will say, though, that Sharpe's observation that "[i]n the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (9) seems to me to describe perfectly the encounter between Ike and Roth's lover in "Delta Autumn." Indeed, it could serve as a rewriting of Faulkner's famous line in *Requiem for a Nun*, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

writes[6] that after adding new material to "Pantaloon in Black" and "Delta Autumn" as he prepared them for inclusion in *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner both created "The Fire and the Hearth" out of three previously-existing stories and, even more crucially, added the long fourth section of "The Bear." What happened, that compelled Faulkner to engage in writing this additional material?

Basically, Roth's lover's arrival in "Delta Autumn" is what happened. Of course, while reworking the first version of that story, it was Faulkner's conscious decision to have Roth become Ike's kinsman and to make Roth's lover the granddaughter of James "Tennie's Jim" Beauchamp. Still, something in that new material compelled Faulkner to add that section to "The Bear." As readers know, it is a crucial addition. In that section, we learn why Ike refused to take possession of his grandfather's plantation (something we learn nowhere else in the novel), and we learn of Ike's attempts to find and pass on the money his grandfather had bequeathed to his Black descendants. (Regarding the specifics of Ike's passing on the money to Lucas Beauchamp, Faulkner provides a fuller description of that moment in the material added to "The Fire and the Hearth.") Roth's lover at least alludes to all this past information in the new material in "Delta Autumn." Ike signals his reluctance to revisit those past memories when he says to her, a couple of times, "Never mind that" (341, 343). Yet, here we are in "The Bear," reading these things.

In a blog post on this novel[7], I wrote, in reference to Minrose Gwin's essay "Her Space, His Hand: The Spaces of African American Women in *Go Down, Moses*," "Faulkner is not completely in control of the forces created by certain of his black characters' narratives as they push against the

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[6] My source for this is p. 147 of Philip M. Weinstein's book *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns* (Cambridge UP, 2008).

[7] "'His normal sensitivity to negro behavior': Looking for black and heterotopic spaces in *Go Down, Moses*," *Domestic Issue* 6 Mar. 2016 (johnbuaas.com/2016/03/06/his-normal-sensitivity-to-negro-behavior-looking-for-black-and-heterotopic-spaces-in-go-down-moses/).

confines of the world in which they find themselves." I want to amend this statement to note that I have come to believe that something like the obverse is also true: that neither can Faulkner completely control his white characters' responses as they encounter black spaces in this novel—indeed, Faulkner seems not to be able to control his own responses to those spaces. I mean no disrespect to him when I say that this is because he does not understand them. I think this is especially true of what we see happening in "Delta Autumn" and Faulkner's *post hoc* emendations to, in particular, "The Bear." Ike may not have wanted to hear or think about what Roth's lover says to him in that hunting camp; but then again, it's probably the case that she does not much care what Ike thinks: her description of herself while on her sojourn with Roth, "I was listening to myself," seems to apply equally well to her conversation with Ike. In any event, she certainly commands Faulkner's attention. Still, as I'll discuss below, that additional material does not neatly close up what otherwise would have been narrative gaps in the novel. Rather, they cause still other spaces in his narrative to emerge created by African-Americans that Faulkner himself intuitively understands have now but, to his immense credit, lets stand as vaguely understood.

"Never mind that": Re-opening the McCaslin ledgers

A take on Ike's and Roth's lover's conversation that at least at one time was standard in writing on "Delta Autumn" is that Ike has trouble understanding the woman's meaning as she describes her relationship with Roth, and that that trouble is her fault and not Ike's. As you have seen, in this book's chapter on *Go Down, Moses* I argue that listening to what she actually says, rather than reading her through the filter of Ike's incomprehension, reveals that she speaks from a heterotopic space defined by her love for Roth, one that transcends–even ignores–the animosity borne of racial difference and anger that Ike presumes should exist on the woman's part toward

Roth. Here, though, I would add to this one other observation: that Ike, in a couple of instances which do not appear in the original version of "Delta Autumn," hears the woman all too well yet refuses to engage with her at those points. Instead, he tells her, "Never mind that," in order to signal that refusal. At one level, Faulkner-as-writer realizes that he has to prepare his reader for all of this by adding the material that explains the reason for Ike's refusal to inherit his grandfather's plantation. But I would also argue that at a deeper level, Faulkner-as-white-Southern-writer is also choosing to engage with *her*, resulting in material added to the fourth section of "The Bear" that, from the standpoint of *Ike's* story, does not absolutely need to be included but nevertheless is. More about those sections later.

Here are those points where Ike signals his resistance:

The first is shortly after the woman arrives at the hunting tent and Ike attempts to hand her the money that Roth had left for her; the narrator describes the awkwardness of Ike's gesture thusly–"as if he had never performed such an action before" (significantly, the original version of "Delta Autumn" does not describe this awkwardness)–and she regards him with "immersed contemplation, that bottomless and intent candor of a child" (341; this is another passage that is not in the original version). Then:

> "You're Uncle Isaac," she said.
>
> "Yes," he said. But never mind that. Here. Take it. He said to tell you No." (341)

Neither Ike nor we yet know that the woman is James Beauchamp's granddaughter, but we have here just a hint of her kinship with Ike in her addressing him as "Uncle Isaac" as opposed to, say, "Roth's uncle Isaac." Ike, for his part, naturally assumes his kinship with Roth is of little importance at this moment and, in any event, is an embarrassment to him under the

circumstances. But she will return to the subject of Ike's kinship with Roth few minutes later via her assessment of how Roth's coming to own the land that Ike had relinquished had affected Roth:

> "I would have made a man of him. He's not a man yet. You spoiled him. You, and Uncle Lucas and Aunt Mollie. But mostly you."
>
> "Me?" he said. "Me?"
>
> "Yes. When you gave to his grandfather that land which didn't belong to him, not even half of it by will or even law."
>
> "And never mind that too," he said. "Never mind that too." (343)

In the original version of "Delta Autumn," we learn Ike had once been married and had children by his wife, but he has outlived them all; that version makes no mention of the land he'd refused to take ownership of. In the version in *Go Down, Moses*, the night before the woman arrives in the camp, the narrator makes passing reference to Ike's relinquishment of the land so as to "repudiate the wrong and shame, at least in principle" (334) and to spare his future son from the "regret and grief" he in his turn would experience. However, there would be no son; as the fourth section of "The Bear" explains in more detail, Ike's wife refuses to have sex with him beyond her consummating their marriage when he refuses her pleading with him to take back the land, and they remain childless. Here in Roth's lover's recrimination, though, the land still curses those who own it, or it curses Roth at least, in her estimation. Surely Ike must believe this to be true as well, or else why would he tell the woman that his (Ike's) relinquishing the land is none of her affair?

I find all of this fascinating to think about because, as noted at the beginning of this post, the sequence in which Faulkner worked on these stories (first "Delta Autumn" and then "The Bear") is, of course, not the sequence in which those sections appear in *Go Down, Moses*. Also as I have

mentioned, readers need to know the reason Ike relinquishes his inheritance so that the woman's condemnation of his decision will make sense when they encounter them. But I also cannot help but think that Faulkner is, in some sense, reproving Ike as well by adding this material. Ike's "Never mind that"s make clear that he does not want even to think about these matters much, let alone talk about them. However, it is as though Faulkner, via the woman's recitation of the black McCaslins (342-343), is telling Ike that he must again revisit those ledgers even though he long ago had begun to believe he would never need to look at them again (259), whether or not he wants to. Hence the recreation of that scene in the fourth section of "The Bear" when Ike reads his grandfather's plantation ledgers and comes to understand that his forbear had fathered a child by one of his own daughters (256-259) and his long argument over his decision with his cousin Carothers McCaslin, Roth's grandfather, which sandwiches those pages.

But as readers of *Go Down, Moses* know, Faulkner goes far beyond only providing that back story in "The Bear." He relates as well Ike's meeting of his obligation to pass on his grandfather's bequests of money to his (the grandfather's) black descendants–material that, from the perspective of the novel's narrative arc, Faulkner does not have to do. I want to suggest here that that going-beyond in "The Bear" is meant to honor the narrative space Roth's lover opens up in "Delta Autumn" as she briefly relates her past as a descendant of James Beauchamp. By speaking, she becomes an incarnation of the ledgers that Ike had thought he would never have to open. Indeed, when one thinks about all of this at the level of the novel's composition, her speaking causes Faulkner to have to write them, and to honor the lives of Ike's grandfather's black descendants by telling their stories.

"I was listening to myself": African-American space in "The Bear"

Maybe the most striking change in the description of Roth's lover from the first version of "Delta Autumn" to the version in *Go Down, Moses* is one word in one sentence, but it sums up well the role she plays in the later version. In the original version, Boyd, the character who will become Roth, says "There will be a woman here sometime this morning, looking for me" (*Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner*, 276). In the version in *Go Down, Moses*, "woman" becomes "message" (339): not even "messenger," but "message." When she arrives at the camp and begins telling Ike about her brief time together with Roth, it is as though, the narrator says, "she was not even speaking to anyone but herself"–and she herself indirectly confirms it, saying she knew Roth would not marry her,

> long before honor I imagine he called it told him the time had come to tell me in so many words what his code I suppose he would call it would forbid him forever to do. And we agreed. Then we agreed again before he left New Mexico, to make sure. That that would be all of it. I believed him. No, I don't mean that; I mean I believed myself. I wasn't even listening to him anymore by then because by that time it had been a long time since he had had anything else to tell me for me to have to hear. By then I wasn't even listening enough to ask him to please stop talking. I was listening to myself. (341-342)

"Honor" and "code"–Roth apparently is something of a "message" himself, based on what she says here–are also words by which Ike has tried to live his whole life. It may in fact be this passage that prompted Faulkner to include those lengthy passages in "The Bear" in which the narrator elaborates on how Ike has tried to live his life. Whether Faulkner intends for the woman's casual dismissal of "honor" and "code" to be quite so devastating a rebuke of Ike is something I cannot determine (for this reader, it certainly has that effect). What I do feel certain of, though, is

that the woman is making clear that "honor" and "code" and their claim to represent some universal set of principles simply do not matter to her. They do not govern how she has chosen to live her life: "I was listening to myself"–and see as well her response, after Ike tells her to go back North and "Marry: a man in your own race" as a way to exact revenge on Roth: "Old man, have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you don't remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?" (346).

The woman is also the granddaughter of James Beauchamp, who had left the McCaslin place on the night he turned 21 (before Ike could pass on to him his inheritance) and thus through his actions shows he also knows about listening to himself. As I said earlier, for purposes of his novel's overarching narrative Faulkner did not need to include the stories of Ike's attempts to pass on the inheritances to his grandfather's black descendants. Yet here Beauchamp's story is–or, rather, what we have is the story of Ike's attempting and failing to find him. It is as though Faulkner's having the woman announce who her grandfather is creates the need in him to tell that story; or, perhaps, because strictly speaking Faulkner still does not need to tell it, he creates the need to honor James Beauchamp's story by telling it.

However, something extraordinary happens: Faulkner not only adds, in both "The Bear" and "The Fire and the Hearth," extra material to the story of Lucas Beauchamp's coming to Ike's house to claim his inheritance and deposit it in the bank, he also creates the story of the marriage of Sophonsiba "Fonsiba" Beauchamp, James' and Lucas' sister, to a man neither Ike nor his cousin had ever seen before, she herself never having left the McCaslin place before, and Ike's subsequent encounter with Fonsiba and her husband in Arkansas.

Though in very different ways, each of these stories has its black characters freeing themselves of the legacy of the plantation (which includes whatever expectations Ike and his other

white relatives might have for them). Lucas changes his name from Lucius, his white grandfather's name, "making it no longer the white man's but his own, by himself composed, himself selfprogenerative and nominate, by himself ancestored" (269). At the same time, we learn in "The Fire and the Hearth," Lucas refuses to use a tractor to plow the land on the old McCaslin place he rents from Roth, as though using a tractor would violate how the land should be cultivated.

Ike's encounter with Fonsiba and her husband in Arkansas, by contrast, bears a couple of striking similarities to his conversation with Roth's lover in "Delta Autumn." Each woman meets her partner by happenstance (Ike never learns how Fonsiba met her future husband; Roth and the woman meet the previous year when Roth has to go into town to replace supplies that had been damaged on the trip to the hunting camp); and each endures hardship (Fonsiba) or rejection (Roth's lover) in favor of an ideal that, in each case, leaves Ike (and, in the case of Fonsiba's story, even the narrator) speechless. I have already noted that Roth's lover insists on coming to the camp, despite having no doubt that Roth refuses to marry her, out of love for him. As for Fonsiba, the narration for Ike's journey to Arkansas works hard to establish the desolate setting through Ike's eyes–mid-winter, an icy rain, the "farm" as not even having a barn or stable, no fire burning in the kitchen where he finds Fonsiba–and presents a lengthy exchange between Ike and her husband in which Ike makes clear his outrage at what he takes to be the man's shiftlessness and over-reliance on the army pension he receives each month. All of this sets up this narratively-remarkable moment when Ike speaks to Fonsiba for the last time:

> only the tremendous fathomless ink-colored eyes in the narrow, then, too thin coffee-colored face watching him without alarm, without recognition, without hope. 'Fonsiba,' he said. 'Fonsiba. Are you all right?'
>
> 'I'm free,' she said. Midnight was a tavern, a livery stable . . . (268)

Note the abrupt jump from Fonsiba's statement to the description of Midnight. We have no response of any kind from Ike, not even a description of the journey back to Midnight. Ike has encountered a heterotopia, you are thinking, an instance of those spaces that we have already seen Foucault describe in Chapter Two of this study. But though Minrose Gwin does not use the word "heterotopia" to describe black women's space in "Her Space, His Hand," the signs she is in search of to my mind are clearly heterotopic in nature as she looks for "the relations between material, cultural, and narrative space as they are occupied by African American women in the novel," whether "their stories push at the boundaries created by the white male characters whose narrative spaces exceed theirs and whose stories may appear to confine theirs to the space of objectification," and whether "their stories radicalize Faulkner's text in ways we have not yet recognized" (75-76). "In short," she succinctly puts it, "where are these stories *located* [her italics] in *Go Down, Moses*? And what do they mean?" (75).

In her summations of Ike's encounters with both these women, Gwin uses Toni Morrison's term "bound blackness" to describe how white characters (and their writers) tend to police black bodies and, by extension, their narratives, saying of Ike, "[H]e is unable to construct new ideological foundations in place of the narratives he decries because he is unable to read black women's texts outside the space of the ledger, the space of bound blackness" (87). Gwin also notes in passing that Faulkner also lacks this ability, and mentions that Faulkner, too, abruptly leaves Fonsiba along with Ike. Additionally, Gwin points to his problematic dedication of *Go Down, Moses* to Caroline Barr, the black woman who served Faulkner's family as their mammy and whom, in the dedication, he seems not to be able to imagine for her a life apart from his own. I cannot argue against Gwin's reading of the novel's dedication, but I will push back a bit against her thinking of Ike as Faulkner's proxy. Whereas *Ike* would have been perfectly content to let these memories lie dormant, unknown to all except himself and as closed as those ledgers he would never (want to) feel he has to look at

again, *Faulkner* is also listening to that woman in Ike's tent in "Delta Autumn"; he understands that those ledgers do not tell the entire stories of the black lives who appear in them and that they need telling, even if he cannot fully understand them himself.